



What You Should Know About Pandemic Flu

A Guide for Individuals and Families

What is pandemic flu?

Pandemic flu refers to any novel flu strain to which humans have little or no natural immunity that causes a widespread outbreak. It is a viral respiratory illness spread easily from person to person and can cause global infection and devastating fatality.

Seasonal flu is a viral respiratory illness to which humans have some immunity. A few strains of A type and B type influenza viruses pop up each year and a different vaccine is developed annually.

Avian flu or **bird flu** refers to type A influenza H5N1 which occurs naturally among birds. Humans have no immunity to this strain. Currently, it is only easily spread by bird-to-human contact. This strain has gotten so much attention because of its virulence in humans and the potential for viruses to mutate. Experts fear it could genetically mutate to spread easily among people, sparking a pandemic.

When will a pandemic hit?

It is unknown when the next influenza pandemic will occur. Its scope and magnitude is also impossible to predict. Pandemics have occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Experts agree that the next pandemic is long overdue, but cannot predict when it will happen.

Experts are closely watching the spread of H5N1. If they observe that it has gone under a significant genetic mutation and is spreading easily among humans, a pandemic is likely. However, the avian flu H5N1 variant may not ever mutate. A different strain may emerge. This is simply another uncertainty about pandemic flu.

A pandemic will not be a sudden event. It will unfold over time. Public health officials will know if there is a novel, emerging flu strain that could cause widespread illness and will track it as it spreads.

What about vaccines and antivirals?

It is difficult to predict what type of flu virus will cause a pandemic. An effective vaccine for a pandemic flu strain cannot be developed until it has already emerged and is efficiently spreading among humans. The development of such a vaccine may take months and the supply may be limited, thus cannot be relied upon to effectively combat a pandemic.

Antivirals are prescription drugs that are used to treat seasonal influenza. They may prevent infection or lessen the duration of symptoms of someone already infected. Experts are not sure whether antiviral medications like *Tamiflu* and *Relenza* will work against a pandemic flu strain. While the federal government is stockpiling these drugs, their effectiveness is not certain and the supply may still be limited.

What can I do?

Disruptions in every day activities and services may occur. Schools, banks, stores, restaurants, government agencies, post offices and health care facilities may be closed or only providing limited services. It may be difficult or impossible to work. Public transportation may be disrupted.

Families or individuals should plan to sustain themselves for several weeks at home in case these inconveniences happen. By staying home, they will also reduce their risk of contact with the virus and limit its spread if they are infected.

Keep an ample supply of food and water on hand

- Ready-to-eat canned meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, beans and soups
- Protein or fruit bars
- Dry cereal or granola-Peanut butter or nuts
- Crackers
- Canned juices
- bottled water
- canned or jarred baby food and formula
- pet food
- other nonperishable foods

Keep an ample supply of medical, health and emergency supplies on hand

- Any prescription drugs and/or medical supplies such as glucose and blood pressure monitoring equipment
- Soap and water, or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fever
- Anti-diarrheal medicine
- vitamins
- thermometer
- fluids with electrolytes
- tissues, toilet paper, disposable diapers
- cleansing agent/soap
- flashlight
- batteries
- portable radio
- manual can opener
- garbage bags

Limit the spread of germs to prevent infection

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues
- Stay away from others if they are sick
- Stay home from work and school if sick

Teach and model the above behaviors to children

What is McLean County Health Department Doing?

McLean County Health Department and other county officials have drafted a response plan for pandemic flu. County officials are working closely with hospitals, emergency responders and local, regional and state officials in developing comprehensive response strategies to protect citizens in McLean County in the event of a pandemic.

“Residents of McLean County can rest assured that the Health Department, in collaboration with its partners, will engage in an ongoing effort to develop and exercise plans that, when called upon, will lead to a highly effective pandemic influenza response.”

-Bob Keller, Director
McLean County Health Department

